

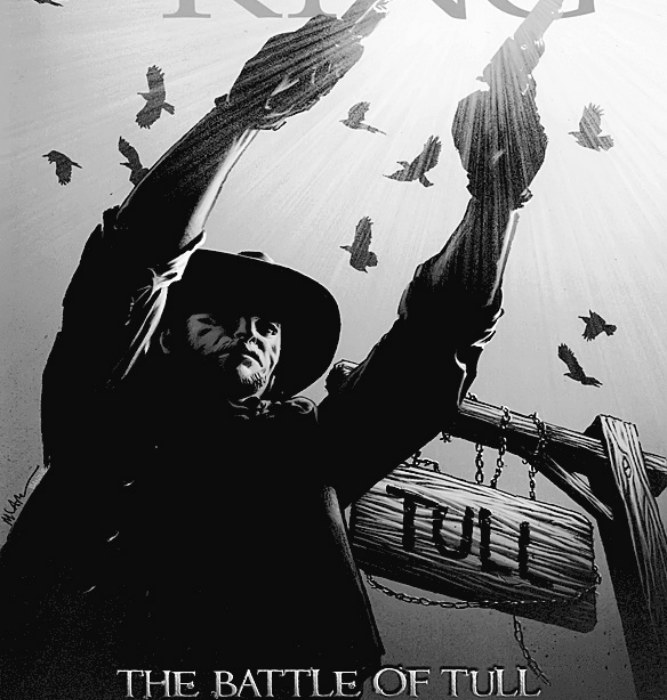
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THE DARK TOWER -THE GUNSLINGER-



THE BATTLE OF TULL

STEPHEN KING THE DARK TOWER

CREATIVE DIRECTOR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
STEPHEN KING

PLOT AND CONSULTATION
ROBIN FURTH

SCRIPT
PETER DAVID

PENCILS
MICHAEL LARK

INKS
STEFANO
GAUDIANO

COLOR ART
RICHARD
ISANOVE

LETTERING
VC'S JOE
SABINO

COVER
MICHAEL LARK
RICHARD ISANOVE

VICE PRESIDENT OF CREATIVE
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SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES & PUBLISHING
DAVID GABRIEL

PRODUCTION
MAYELA GUTIERREZ

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT
RUWAN JAYATILLEKE

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CHARLIE BECKERMAN

CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER
JOE QUESADA

SENIOR EDITOR
RALPH MACCHIO

PUBLISHER
DAN BUCKLEY

EDITOR IN CHIEF
AXEL ALONSO

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Gentle Reader,

After some forty-odd issues of *The Dark Tower*, we've finally made it to the beginning. You heard me right, and no, I haven't been chewing on devil-grass. Those of you who have read *The Dark Tower* novels will recognize the name "Tull," for it's the first story Stephen King tells of our gunslinger, Roland Deschain. What I'm trying to say is that if this happens to be the first issue you've picked up of Marvel's adaptation, you've joined us at a perfect time.

There's a part of me that wants to leave the new reader to his or her own devices, to feel their way through Mid-World as those of us who first met Roland through the novels did—knowing nothing. But the story we are telling here in our humble panels and balloons is not the exact

same story that King told when he first published *The gunslinger* thirty-three years ago. The characters, locations and events are the same, but the most important part of the story is different: the telling.

One of the easiest traps to fall into when talking about stories is to think about them as lines. From a young age, we're told that stories have beginnings, middles, and ends, and while this isn't wrong per se, it is a bit misleading, like saying that a human being is simply a collection of flesh, blood and bones. Those who have read the novels will know this keenly, as with every page turn, the clock is just as likely to spin backwards as it is to tick forwards. But our mission in these last two-score issues has been to fill in the story of Roland Deschain, to connect the dots between the events of *Wizard and Glass* and *The Gunslinger*. We are telling the story of Roland, the boy, becoming Roland, the Man, and to tell this next chapter well, we must look back on where our Roland—which is the same Roland, but also not, do you kennit?—has been.

Our story began with Roland as a boy of thirteen, son of Stephen, citizen of Gilead,

gunslinger-in-training. At the coarse hands of Cort, Roland and his friends—Alain Johns and Cuthbert Allgood—learn to shoot, to fight, and to think. But even in this long-ago, the world has already started to move on. The boys' fathers, all gunslingers themselves, have been battling John Farson, a.k.a. "the Good Man," who seeks to take over Mid-World, and Gilead is one of the last places of peace and happiness. And even that is fleeting.

One of Stephen Deschain's advisers, Marten Broadcloak, is secretly in service of The Good Man. However, this is unknown to Roland when he discovers that Broadcloak is his mother's illicit lover. After finding his mother in bed with Broadcloak, Roland runs straight to Cort, initiating the ritual all young men must perform before they become gunslingers: defeating his teacher in combat. Allowed only one weapon, Roland cleverly chooses his pet falcon, David, and though the bird loses his life, Roland bests his master. "Today, you teach me no more, bondsman. I teach you."

Becoming one of the youngest gunslingers, Roland and his friends are sent on a special mission to the Barony of Mejis to gather intelligence about the growing influence of the Good Man. While there, however, Roland falls deeply in love with a young girl from the village of Hambry named Susan. When the boys' true purpose is discovered, Hambry reveals its ugly side,

and Susan is burned alive as punishment.

Bearing the evil Seeing Sphere known as Maerlyn's Grapefruit—Farson's greatest prize—Roland and his friend begin the long trek back to Gilead. But just as his ka-tet sets out, the mystical object draws Roland's consciousness deep into its demonic realm, leaving his body limp and lifeless while he suffers the wrath of the dreaded tyrant, the Crimson King—to whom Farson is beholden. Saved by his young friend Sheemie, Roland seems to have a moment of peace.

But looks can be deceiving. Secretly, Roland remains under the influence of the sphere, drawn to the orb's ominous pinkish glow. While in Gilead, treachery brews. His mother, Gabrielle, having seemingly repented for her adultery with Broadcloak, is lured into a plot to assassinate her husband. While Steven Deschain discovers his wife's betrayal, Roland's former teacher, the ex-gunslinger Cort, slays Farson's nephew for his involvement in the assassination plot.

This story ends well for no



one—Roland is tricked by the evil Seeing Sphere into shooting his mother, and Cort falls prey to poison found on the pages of a diary. But these tragic events convince Cort's niece, Aileen, that she must ignore the ancient law that bars girls from taking up guns, and she becomes Gilead's first female gunslinger.

Determined to stop this madness, Steven resolves to track and capture the Good Man, kill Broadcloak, and retrieve Maerlyn's Grapefruit. But at Farson's camp, as Deschain's mission is underway, betrayal from within his group finds Steven and his gunslingers in the throes of a fierce gun battle. Steven survives, only to be assassinated by an agent of the Good Man, leaving the fate of Gilead in the hands of Roland.

Despite the best defenses erected in ancient times by the fabled Arthur Eld, Roland fails to save the city from Farson's army. Gilead falls, years pass, and Roland and his ka-tet are driven into hiding—until they discover that a beam supporting the Dark Tower has been damaged, bringing the world one step closer to

destruction. Coming out of hiding, Roland is determined to reach the Tower, use its endless energies to defeat Farson, and set the world right.

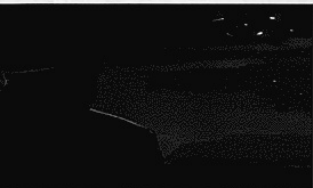
But Roland and his ka-tet, Gilead's final protectors, falter, and in the Battle of Jericho Hill, Roland loses his comrades. Left alone, the sole survivor of that last, losing battle, Roland forges ahead on his quest to reach the Dark Tower, pursuing the Man in Black. His trek takes him through the ruins of Gilead, and through the haunted town of Eluria, where a convent of vampiric nuns nearly kill him—and where one Sister, outcast, almost helps him to find love. However, as with all things that Roland loves, she is lost to the wheel of ka.

And so, we find ourselves confronted with the iconic image that opens *the Dark Tower*: "The man in black fled across the desert, and the gunslinger followed." Do not think of it as repetition, but rather, like the staircase within the Dark Tower itself, as a spiral, going around and around but never coming to the same place. If this is your first journey through Mid-World, then have patience, and enjoy the ride.

And for those of you who have reached the top of the Tower already, well, you know exactly what I'm talking about.

Long days and pleasant nights,

Charlie Beckerman
Assistant Editor





Pricetown, situated southeast of the Pesatoya Mountains, is where ya come to barter whatever ya can, be it chickens, clothes, or your soul...

...and really, at the end of the day, who's to say which is the more useful, do ya kenneit?

It's here that Roland Deschain, the gunslinger, late of Gilead (which itself was also late) comes passing through.



In a marketplace crammed with people, somehow he manages to navigate it without touching any of 'em, like a ghost...



...or maybe an angel. Though if you're thinking he's any angel save the one of death...

...then you been paying no attention to the stories I've been telling.

No more attention than Roland himself pays to hucksters trying to vend their wares.



"...you'd be better off riding one of my girls."

Well, he was lying about the women, but he was certainly honest enough about the horses. Shows which he values more.

Excuse me. I'm looking for a mount that's threaded. Creatures with two heads or six eyes are of no use to me.

Huh.

CHUNK - CHUNK

Nor me. What I can use is a man with money.

If you're not one, then piss off. If you are...

I may have just what'cha need.

There ya go. Best threaded mule I've got. Only one, in fact. Cost ya twelve gold pieces.

It's threaded all right, but the beast isn't worth five, much less more.

Take it or leave it, but if it's the former, I'll toes in a saddle.



Roland extracts the money from his growbag. A gift from his father, it grows coins and, on occasion, gems.

Aside from his guns, it's about the only artifact left from the life he once led.



By the way, have you seen a man in black come through these parts?

In black? Like a preacher for the man-Jesus?

His pursuits are far less holy, but yes, similar to that.

Perhaps. But information costs around here.



Indeed.



That might jog my memory.



I'd just as soon jog your teeth. I'll have done with your greed.

Speak now, or be forever in pieces.

"I...I *seen* 'im, clear
as I see *you*! Couple
weeks ago!

"In a black cassock, driving an old rig
with a tarp, pulled by a threaded
bug! That's why I noticed 'im, 'cause
the horse was so gorgeous!"



He was
headed southeast
on the old coach road,
toward the desert! I swear
by all that's sacred--!



OOOOOF!



Here's the
only thing you
hold sacred.



Go to
hell.

Already
there.





You might be wonderin', how did Roland know the stableman was telling the truth?

Sure as hell he might've been lying. Covering up for the man in black for no other reason than that Roland was looking for him.

Or perhaps the man in black even paid him off to set Roland on a wrong course.



Anything's possible, but really-- what other choice does Roland have but to follow whatever leads he can get?



As the land around him deteriorates, it soon becomes obvious why only he and the man in black are heading in this direction.

The land becomes baked and infertile and unlivable. It's an ugly country. It showered twice since he had left Pricetown, grudgingly both times.



Pass-on-by country. Who in his right mind would live out here?

*Funny you
should ask.*



'Cause you ain't
the only one.

A town?
Who in his right
mind would live
out here?





He clucks at the mule, sending it down toward what might well be a ghost town.



A gentle wind stirs the bell lightly in the tower of the decrepit church. Perhaps the bell's tinkling brings unbidden memories of a certain Little Sister.



If so, it brings him no pleasure.



He passes a tiny graveyard with moldy, leaning crosses and slabs overgrown and choked by the rank devil-grass.

Perhaps five hundred feet further on there is a chewed sign which simply reads...



He hears a fool's chorus of half-stoned voices rising in the final protracted lyric of "Hey Jude" as he enters the town proper.

It's a dead sound, like the wind in the hollow of a rotted tree.



Only the prosaic thump and pound of a honky-tonk piano stops you from seriously wondering if the man in black might not have raised ghosts to inhabit the deserted town.

There are people in the street, but not many. Their footfalls raise little hanging clouds of dust.



He can feel their eyes resting heavily upon the low slung holsters that lie against his hips.

Hey in there!

Hey, yourself.



I got
a mule
here.



Good
for you.
How long
you want him
put up?



A night
or two. Maybe
longer.



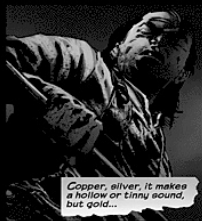
Hope you
ain't looking
for charity.



I'm looking
for things, but
none of them
charitable.



The money lands at his
feet, making that same
commanding noise that
gold always makes.



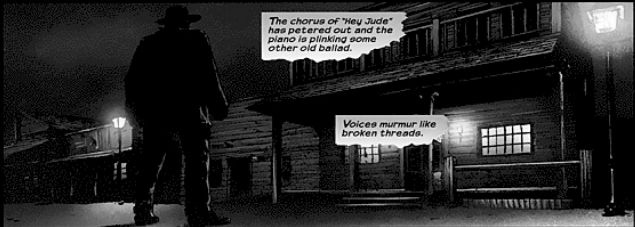




The eyes of the boy's mates had turned ugly and hostile. Roland knows the boy will now pay for having spoken up in kindness.

*Weedeater!
How long you
been screwin' your
sister, Charlie!?
Weedeater!*

*The little cruelties of
youth help prepare
you for the bigger
cruelties of the world.*



*The chorus of "Hey Jude"
has petered out and the
piano is plinking some
other old ballad.*

*Voices murmur like
broken threads.*



*When he enters, heads
swivel to look at him
and his guns.*

*'Cept for the one that belongs
to the old weed-eater in the
corner. That one's collapsed
on the table, as per usual.*

*And the one that belongs to the
piano player, a 'course, who keeps
a-tinklin'. But Sheb ain't never been
bright. If he was, this saloon would
still belong to him, not the scarred
girl behind the bar.*



Sawdust floor, spittoons by the tipsy-legged tables.

Some townies in the back, juicing and playing Watch Me apathetically. Some others grouped 'round the piano.

All the normal things.



'Course it's the abnormal things what'll kill ya.

Cort used t'say, "Expect nothing, anticipate everything."

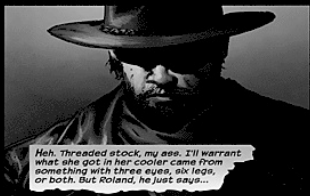
Words t'live by, if you're of a mind to live.



Name's Allie. What'll you have?

You got meat?

Sure.
Clean beef.
Threaded
stock, it's deer.



Heh. Threaded stock, my ass. I'll warrant what she got in her cooler came from something with three eyes, six legs, or both. But Roland, he just says...



I want three burgers and a beer, would it please ya?

That would go you five bucks. Do you ken bucks?

Dollars?
With the beer?
Or is the beer extra?



The woman disappears to put meat on the grill. The smell that arises is maddening.

Roland, he just acts indifferent to the world around him, as if he don't notice the card game slowing down, the sidelong glances of the barflies.



But as ya can guess, Roland ain't indifferent to nothin'.





Do yourself
a favor,
cully.



The atmosphere shifts
back again. The bald man
gets off lucky.

On another day, Roland
might've shot him just
on principle.



Do you
have salt?

Yup.

Bread?

No bread.



He must've known she
was lying, but he'd
also have known why,
and doesn't push it.

Threaded stock, she'd
said the meat had come
from. Yup, quite likely.



And pigs would dance the
commale in the light of
the Peddler's moon.

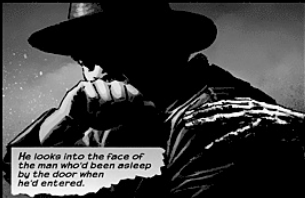


*Then the room once
more goes silent, and
you can taste the
tension in the air.*

*Roland becomes aware of it,
finishing his beer even as his
hand drifts toward his gun.*



*That's when the hand
falls on his shoulder.*



*He looks into the face of
the man who'd been asleep
by the door when
he'd entered.*



*The odor of the
devil-grass is a
rank miasma.*

*He looks into the staring, glaring eyes
of one who sees but does not see,
eyes ever turned inward to the sterile
hell of dreams beyond control...*

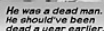
*...dreams unleashed, risen
out of the stinking swamps
of the unconscious.*



This man, if I could call 'im that, wasn't even smoking the weed anymore. He was chewing it. Really chewing it.



Hile, gunslinger. Ye of the White, ye of Eld. Fan-gon dinh of Gilead-that-was.



He was a dead man. He should've been dead a year earlier.



The gold for a favor, gunslinger-sai. Just one? For a pretty?



You speak...the High Speech?



Ahhhhh...



Sheb! Sheb, you come back here, goddammit!



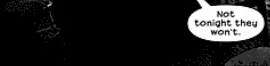
Where are you all going?! Don't leave me with--



There! You've driven out my trade! Are you satisfied?



They'll be back.



Not tonight they won't.



Who is he?
I have to know. He...

He talked to you funny. Nort never talked like that in his life.

I'm looking for a man. You would know him.

Nothing comes around here without a price, so name the cost for what you can tell me.



I guess maybe you know my price.



I got an itch I used to be able to take care of, but now I can't.



Oh.

He looks at her steadily. The scar wouldn't show in the dark.

Her body, it's lean enough so the desert and grit and grind hadn't been able to sag everything.

And she'd once been pretty, maybe even beautiful.



Don't look!

You don't have to look at me so mean!





There's no light to
hide their act...

And if Allie's
maidenhead is
long gone...

...at least she can feel
something of her
maidenhood again.



The act means
nothing and yet it
means everything.



And for just a few
moments, Cort's
advice is gone from
Roland's head.



Although,
to be fair...

Who could have
anticipated this?

Sheb!

She's
mine!!!

TO BE CONTINUED.



ROLAND'S JOURNEY TO TULL

Dear Fellow Constant Readers:

If you are like me, the opening sequence of *The Gunslinger* is an all-time favorite. I love the way Stephen King so seamlessly weaves his story together. From the moment we read that iconic opening line, "The man in black fled across the desert, and the gunslinger followed," we are drawn into Roland's quest for his elusive quarry. We walk with him over the dry, purgatorial wastes of the Mohaine Desert, and we hunker down next to him as he inspects the charred remains of the Man in Black's campfire. We watch Old Mother shining in the cold desert sky, and then, the next day, we follow our gunslinger as he crests a dune and sees the low-backed sod roof of a desert dweller's hut. While sharing a meal with the dweller

named Brown and Brown's strange companion—a scrawny raven named Zoltan—Roland recounts the horrors of his journey to a dilapidated town called Tull.

In terms of storytelling style, I think this opening section is incredibly cinematic. From the first line of the story our author paints a vivid picture of a man on a quest, a man who has obviously faced awful trials, though we do not yet know what those trials might have been. Brown's lines, "You're a gunslinger. That right? . . . Thought your kind was gone," resonates with such a sense of epic struggle and epic loss that we wait with bated breath to find out more about our intriguing protagonist.

In movies and TV, writers often talk about creating a hook which will grab audiences from the very outset. For me, that image of Roland pursuing his arch enemy across the desert and his subsequent interaction with Brown is a powerful hook. By the time Roland begins his flashback to Tull, the book might as well be glued to my hands, because I'm certainly not going to put it down!

Choosing to tell the story of Tull in flashback was another inspired move. Steve King sets the scene,



and the tale unfolds completely naturally. We are a fly on the wall of Brown's sod-roofed hut, watching the interaction of two men who are not completely certain that they can trust each other, or whether they can trust the reality that they inhabit. Are they alive, or are they in purgatory? We do not know, and neither do they.

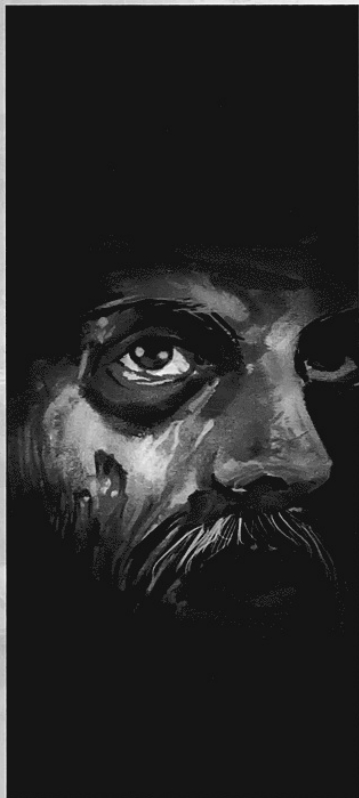
When it came to the Tull story arc—the first installment of which you hold in your hands—I was faced with some heart-breaking realities. Though I loved the way Steve began *The Gunslinger*, it wasn't possible for our comic book tet to follow his example. We'd already illustrated that iconic opening scene of pursuit twice already—the first time in *The Gunslinger Born* and the second time in *The Journey Begins*—so we needed to give our readers something different. Roland's interaction with Brown and Zoltan also appeared in *The Journey Begins*, so I felt it was time to try a new tack—one that paid homage to Stephen King's brilliant vision, but which illustrated new and hopefully surprising aspects of Steve's story.

Since Roland could no longer recount the tale of Tull in flashback

(Brown is no longer there to listen!), I decided to tell the story in linear time. But where to begin? I decided to start with a line in the original novel that I'd always found extremely intriguing: "He bought the mule in Pricetown, and when he reached Tull, it was still fresh." What was Pricetown like, and how could I use it to give a sense of wider Mid-World, and of the horrors it had undergone since John Farson had triumphed over the gunslingers of Gilead? The more I thought about Pricetown, the more ideas began to percolate in my head.

In *The Gunslinger*, Stephen King frequently tells us that Mid-World has "moved on." In this world that has "moved on," the landscape is desiccating, the animals are mutating, and human culture is unraveling. And it is this process of "moving on" which I decided to illustrate in Pricetown.

For Constant Readers who have journeyed with us since *The Gunslinger Born*, Pricetown won't come as a shock. Haven't we visited corrupt and dilapidated places before? But in Pricetown, we hopefully get a sense that this corruption (in every sense of the word) is now more widespread. In fact,



it is endemic. And by the time we reach Pricetown, we see that it is not only Mid-World culture that has continued to decline—our gunslinger has changed as well. Roland is no longer a young man who will shoot at the ground in front of a dog or a mutant to warn them away (as he did in *Little Sisters of Eluria*). He is a man who will shoot to kill. This Roland is harder, more impatient, perhaps even crueler. Life has taken its toll, and Roland is becoming the man of the original novel—a man who is capable of killing those he loves, or of betraying them in pursuit of his goal. Since we no longer open our tale with Roland following the trail of the Man in Black, we now discover, through Roland's discussions with the stableman selling mules, that Roland is still pursuing his elusive, magical quarry. And when the stableman tries to cheat Roland, we get a taste of Roland's temper.

As in the novel, Roland's journey from Pricetown to Tull is a depressing trek. The land grows steadily drier, and the human habitations become more and more wrecked. When Roland reaches the outskirts of Tull he passes by an old church—foreshadowing the conflicts that will later take place there. Although we have already seen the shady characters

operating in Pricetown, by the time we reach Tull, the cruelty and hardness of Mid-World's inhabitants is a shock. The stableman named Kennerly has no respect for gunslingers, nor do the aggressive and violent boys playing marbles. Gone are the old ways—the belief in honor, the sense of justice and fairness. In this part of Mid-World, the human heart has grown as dry as the Mohaine Desert. By the time a man draws a knife on Roland in Sheb's honkey-tonk, we are not surprised but we are sad. No one respects gunslingers anymore. How times have changed!

One of my favorite scenes in the Tull sequence is when Nort (the weed-eater) addresses Roland in High Speech. Not only does it hint that something truly catastrophic has happened to this wrecked weed-eater, but Nort himself serves as a metaphor of what has happened to the old ways. High Speech—once the language of gunslingers and magic—now only issues from the mouth of a shambling addict.

Once again, my dear fellow Constant Readers, thanks for traveling with us. We appreciate your company and hope you are enjoying the journey. Until next month, long days and pleasant nights!

Robin Furth



SPECIAL PREVIEW OF ISSUE 2 INKS BY MICHAEL LARK AND STEFANO GAUDIANO





COVER INKS FOR TULL #1 BY MICHAEL LARK



NEXT: "DIDN'T I TELL YOU I'D SHOW YOU A WONDER?"





All is not well in Mid-World. Gunslinger Roland Deschain has seen his father's Affiliation fall to the Good Man's forces. With his ka-tet murdered and Gilead in ruins, Roland has accepted his destiny to seek and save the Dark Tower, and set right this out-of-synch world. For now, Roland's search has him crossing the desert, pursuing the Man in Black, who holds the key to finding the Dark Tower. However, the Man in Black has left traps in his wake for the gunslinger, and upon entering the sleepy town of Tull, Roland fears he may have just stepped into one.

From the creative team that brought Roland's early adventures to life comes a new phase in the saga of the last gunslinger. This is a dark chronicle of revenge, lust, betrayal, and destiny—a cosmic quest that could only be conceived by master storyteller Stephen King.

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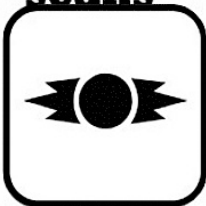


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